policies on the agricultural subsistence economy because they could not afford the market price of fertilizer, the African country's government decided to subsidize the chemical. The result was a bumper crop and the end of malnutrition.

**Key Terms**
- allocation of resources p. 116
- distribution p. 116
- division of labor p. 116
- economic system p. 116
- market economies p. 117
- market exchange p. 116
- production p. 116
- reciprocal exchange p. 117
- redistribution p. 117
- subsistence economies p. 117
- technology p. 116
- unit of production p. 116

## 13

**Reciprocity and the Power of Giving**

**Lee Cronk**

As we saw in the introduction to Part Four, reciprocity constitutes an important exchange system in every society. At the heart of reciprocal exchange is the idea of giving. In this article, Lee Cronk explores the functions of giving using a variety of examples from societies around the world. Giving may be benevolent. It may be used to strengthen existing relationships or to form new ones. Gifts may also be used aggressively to "light" people, to "batten" them with generosity. Givers often gain position and prestige in this way. Gifts may also be used to place others in debt so that one can control them and require their loyalty. Cronk shows that, in every society from Kung hoxo exchange to American foreign aid, there are "strings attached" to giving that affect how people and groups relate to each other.

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During a trek through the Rockies in the 1830s, Captain Benjamin Louis E. de Bonneville received a gift of a fine young horse from a Nez Percé chief. According to Washington Irving's account of the incident, the American explorer was aware that "a parting pledge was

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necessary on his own part, to prove that this friendship was reciprocated." Accordingly, he "placed a handsome rifle in the hands of the venerable chief; whose benediction was evidently touched and gratified by this outward and visible sign of amity."

Even the earliest white settlers in New England understood that presents from natives required reciprocity; and by 1764, "Indian gift" was so common a phrase that the Massachusetts colonial historian Thomas Hutchinson identified it as a "proper expression, signifying a present for which an equivalent return is expected." Thus, over time, the custom's meaning was lost. Indeed, the phrase now is used derisively, to refer to one who demands the return of a gift. How this cross-cultural misunderstanding occurred is unclear, but the poet Lewis Hyde, in his book The Gift, has imagined a scenario that probably approaches the truth.

Say that an Englishman newly arrived in America is welcomed to an Indian lodge with the present of a pipe. Thinking the pipe a wonderful artifact, he takes it home and sets it on his mantelpiece. When he later learns that the Indians expect to have the pipe back, as a gesture of goodwill, he is shocked by what he views as their short-lived generosity. The newcomer did not realize that, to the natives, the point of the gift was not to provide an interesting trinket but to inaugurate a friendly relationship that would be maintained through a series of mutual exchanges. Thus, his failure to reciprocate appeared not only rude and thoughtless but downright hostile. "White man keeping" was as offensive to native Americans as "Indian giving" was to settlers.

In fact, the Indians' tradition of gift giving is much more common than our own. Like our European ancestors, we think that presents ought to be offered freely, without strings attached. But through most of the world, the strings themselves are the main consideration! In some societies, gift giving is a tie between friends; a way of maintaining good relationships, whereas in others it has developed into an elaborate, expensive, and antagonistic ritual designed to humiliate rivals by showering them with wealth and obligating them to give more in return.

In truth, the dichotomy between the two traditions of gift giving is less behavioral than rhetorical: our generosity is not as unconditional as we would like to believe. Like European colonists, most modern Westerners are blind to the purpose of reciprocal gift giving, not only in non-Western societies but also, to some extent, in our own. Public declarations to the contrary, we, too, use gifts to nurture long-term relationships of mutual obligation, as well as to embarrass our rivals and to foster feelings of indebtedness. And this ethic touches all aspects of contemporary life, from the behavior of scientists in research networks to superpower diplomacy. Failing to acknowledge this fact, especially as we give money, machines, and technical advice to peoples around the world, we run the risk of being misinterpreted and, worse, of causing harm.

Much of what we know about the ethics of gift giving comes from the attempts of anthropologists to trade things to the people they are studying. Richard Lee, of the University of Toronto, learned a difficult lesson from the Kung hunter-gatherers, of the Kalahari desert, when, as a token of goodwill, he gave them an ox to slaughter at Christmas. Expecting gratitude, he was shocked when the Kung complained about having to make do with such a creaky "bag of bones." Only later did Lee learn, with relief, that the Kung did not return gifts. In their eyes, an act is completely generous, or free of calculation; ridiculing gifts is their way of diminishing the expected return and of enforcing humility on those who would use gifts to raise their own status within the group.

Rada Dyson-Hudson, of Cornell University, had a similar experience among the Turkana, a pastoral people of northwestern Kenya. To compensate her informants for Turkana's reaction was less than heartwarming. A typical response to a gift of a pot, for a bigger one to give me? To the Turkana, these are legitimate and expected questions, gifts not trade with and I presented to them during our fieldwork in 1986. Clothing was enough. Every gift horse was examined carefully, in the mouth and elsewhere. Like the Ixian, the Turkana believe that all gifts have an element of calculation, and efforts to diminish our expectations and lessen their obligations to repay were as fair as our attempts to get on their good side.

The idea that gifts carry obligations is instilled early in life. When we gave the tie: "Remember these white people? They are the ones who gave you candy." They part with their precious candies, already in their mouths. Most of the Ixian's soda sweets, only to have them immediately returned. A mother might take, at most, a symbolic nibble from her child's candy, just to drive home the lesson.

The way food, utensils, and other goods are received in many societies is only expected, it is crucial that it be deferred. To reciprocate at once indicates a desire to strengthen. This is especially clear on the Turk Islands, of Micronesia, where a special network. From the Trukese viewpoint, to return nifiga on the same day it is received alters its nature from that of a gift to that of a sale, in which all that matters is material gain.

After deciding the proper time for response, a recipient must consider how to make repayment, and that is dictated largely by the motive behind the gift. Some system, called hazo, in which little attention is paid to whether the items exchanged Ixian explained to him that "Hazo is when things don't give back to me. When I find something good I give it to you, and we will pass the years together." When Lee tried to determine the exact exchange values of various items (Is a spear worth three strings of beads, two strings, or one?), Ixian explained that any return would be all right: "You see, we don't trade with things, we trade with people!"

One of the most elaborate systems of reciprocal gift giving, known as kula, exists in a ring of islands off New Guinea. Kula gifts pass along a clockwise circuit of shell necklaces, ornaments, and arm bands. The necklace passes through the archipelago, through the arm bands, and the arm bands counter clockwise, through the necklaces. Kula gifts vary in jewelry, such as earplugs, arm bands, and shell ornaments, and arm bands. The arm bands pass from one island to another, and the necklace passes from one island to another. Kula gifts also vary in value, and men gain fame and prestige by having their names associated with the necklace and arm bands.
Although the act of giving gifts seems intrinsically benevolent, a gift's power to embarrass the recipient and to force repayment has, in some societies, made it attractive as a weapon. Such agnostic generosity reached its most elaborate expression, during the late nineteenth century, among the Kwakiutl, of British Columbia. The Kwakiutl's potlatches, at which rival families competed for the honor and prestige of giving away the greatest amount of property, were characterized by vast displays of wealth. Any gift, whether in the form of food, clothing, or ornaments of value, was rejected if it was not accepted. The Kwakiutl believed that the acceptance of a gift was a sign of friendship and that the rejection of a gift was a sign of hostility.

The Kwakiutl were acutely conscious of status, and individuals who did not receive status gifts were often ostracized or even killed. This system of status gifts was based on a hierarchical structure, with the most powerful individuals receiving the most valuable gifts. The Kwakiutl believed that the value of a gift was inversely proportional to its worth, and that the receipt of a gift was a sign of the giver's power and prestige.

Such networks of exchange are not limited to the poor, nor do they always involve political processes. Just as the exchange of clothes creates a gift community in the Flats, so the swapping of knowledge may create one among scientists. Warren Hagstrom, a sociologist at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, has pointed out that papers submitted to scientific journals are often called contributions, an indication that the knowledge they contain is not in exchange for money, and that what is received in return for them is truly a gift. In contrast, articles written for profit—such as this one—are often held in low esteem: scientific status can be achieved only through giving gifts of knowledge.

Recognition also can be traded upon, with scientists building up their gift-giving networks by paying careful attention to citations and acknowledgments. Like participants in kula exchange, they try to associate themselves with renowned and prestigious articles, books, and institutions. A desire for recognition, however, cannot be openly acknowledged as a motivation for research, and it is a rare scientist who is able to discuss such desires candidly. Hagstrom was able to find just one mathematician (whom he described as "something of a social isolate") to confirm that "junior mathematicians want recognition from big shots and, consequently, work in areas prized by them."

Hagstrom also points out that the inability of scientists to acknowledge a desire for recognition does not mean that such recognition is not expected by those who offer gifts of knowledge. Any more than a kula trader believes it is all right if his trading partner does not answer his gift of a necklace with an armband. While failure to reciprocate in New Guinea society might once have meant warfare, among scientists it may cause factionalism and the creation of rivalries.

So the Flats of Illinois or in the halls of academia, swapping is, for the most part, benign. But manipulative gift giving exists in modern societies, too—particularly in paternalistic government practices. The technique is to offer a present that cannot be repaid, coupled with a claim of beneficence and omnicence. The Johns Hopkins University anthropologist Grace Goodell documented one example in Iran's Khu-zesta-n Province, which, because it contains most of the country's oil fields and is next door to Iraq, is a strategically sensitive area. Goodell focused on the World Bank-funded Dez irrigation project, a showcase of the Shah's ambitious "white revolution" development plan. The scheme involved the irrigation of tens of thousands of acres and the forced relocation of people from their villages to new, model towns. According to Goodell, the purpose behind displacing local institutions was to enhance central government control of the region. Before development, each Khu-zesta-n village had been a miniature city-state, managing its own internal affairs and determining its own relations with outsiders. In the new settlements, decisions were made by government bureaucrats, not townspeople, whose autonomy was crushed under the weight of a large and strategically placed gift.

On a global scale, both the benevolent and aggressive dimensions of gift giving are at work in superpower diplomacy. Just as the Kwakiutl were left only with blankets with which to fight after warfare was banned, the United States and the Soviet Union, whether with war out of the question, that they are left only with gifts—called concessions—with which to do battle. Offers of military cutbacks are easy ways to score points in the public arena of international opinion and to shame rivals, and failure either to accept such offers or to respond with even more extreme offers may be seen as cowardice or as hubris. Mikhail Gorbachev is a virtuoso, a master potlatcher, in this new kind of competition, and, predictably, Americans often see his offers of disarmament and openness as gifts with long strings attached. One reason U.S. officials were buoyed last December [1988], when, for the first time since the
Second World War, the Soviet Union accepted American assistance, in the aftermath of the Armenian earthquake, is that it seemed to signal a wish for reciprocity rather than dominance—an unspoken understanding of the power of gifts to bind people together.

Japan, faced with a similar desire to expand its influence, has also begun to exploit gift giving in its international relations. In 1989, it will spend more than ten billion dollars on foreign aid, putting it ahead of the United States for the second consecutive year as the world's greatest donor nation. Although this move was publicly welcomed in the United States as the sharing of a burden, it was, too, expressed in the United States as a further slip in our international status. Third World leaders also have complained that too much Japanese aid is targeted at countries in which Japan has an economic stake and that too much is restricted to the purchase of Japanese goods—that Japan's generosity has less to do with addressing the problems of underdeveloped countries than with exploiting those problems to its own advantage.

The danger in all of this is that wealthy nations may be competing for the prestige that comes from giving gifts at the expense of Third World nations. With assistance sometimes being given with more regard to the donors' status than to the recipients' welfare, it is no surprise that, in recent years, development aid has been more effective in creating relationships of dependency, as in the case of Iran's Khuzestan irrigation scheme, than in producing real development. Nor that, given the fine line between donation and domination, offers of help are sometimes met with resistance, apprehension and, in extreme cases, such as the Iranian revolution, even violence.

The idea that a gift's ambivalent power to unify, antagonize, or subjugate. We, too, would do well to remember that a present can be a surprisingly potent thing, as dangerous in the hands of the ignorant as it is useful in the hands of the wise.

### Review Questions

1. What does Cronk mean by reciprocality? What is the social outcome of reciprocal gift giving?
2. According to Cronk, what are some examples of beneficent gift giving?
3. How can giving be used to intimidate other people or groups? Give some examples cited by Cronk and think of some from your own experience.
4. How does Cronk classify gift-giving strategies such as government foreign aid? Can you think of other examples of the use of exchange as a political device?

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**Poverty at Work: Office Employment and the Crack Alternative**

**Philippe Bourgois**

There was a time in the United States when people with little education and money could find work in manufacturing plants or other settings requiring manual labor. Many of the skills they needed could be learned on the job and they could make a modest but decent living and support a family. And despite their working-class identity, their jobs gave them dignity and a place in society. But in today's America, manufacturing jobs have often disappeared, leaving thousands of poorly educated people without equivalent work.

In this article, Philippe Bourgois illustrates how this problem has affected unskilled and largely uneducated Puerto Rican men and women in New York City's Spanish Harlem. Manufacturing jobs once provided dignified and stable employment for Puerto Rican men and women. As factories closed during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, the unemployed could find work only in service industries such as security corporations, law firms, and insurance companies. Because they were uneducated and culturally different, they could hold only minimum-wage jobs in such worlds, as they are usually controlled by educated, largely Anglo people who openly look down on them. In the end, they could achieve higher status and often higher income in their own ethnic community by dealing drugs. The result has been a destructive spiral into addiction, murder, and prison. Bourgois concludes the article with an addendum noting that high employment in the late 1990s provided more work.